

Impact of Visitation on Destination Image: Examination of Chinese tourists visiting New York City

Yiying He
Hospitality and Tourism Management
Purdue University, USA

And

Jonathon Day
Hospitality and Tourism Management
Purdue University, USA

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, numerous studies have demonstrated that destination image has significant influence on tourist behavior. In the process of traveling decision making, tourists are more appeal to destination with positive, clear and strong images. (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Tasci, 2009) Different levels of impact on consumer buying process are inserted by various types, components and dimensions of destination image. (Tasci & Gartner, 2007) At the same time, destination image modification will take place when tourists are experiencing their visit. (Chon, 1991)

Considerable amount of efforts have been laid on examining the issues related to destination image and consumer behavior, including studies on influence of past experience on destination image (Pearce, 1982; Chon, 1991; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Young, 1999), destination image's effect on consumer behavior prior to the visit (Court & Lupton, 1997; Chen & Hsu, 2000; Leisen, 2001), during the visit (Ross, 1993) and post visit (Ross, 1993; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). However, limited information is available on how different types and channels of information that formed people's destination image insert impacts on different stages of consumer buying process. Thus, further exploration is needed although the broader theme has already been heavily researched. Moreover, destination image at a specific time to a specific market has to be investigated and captured for more effective use of resource in marketing and other destination

management decisions (Tasci, 2007). Studying a potentially significant market segment of a highly popular destination could provide salient industrial implications in practicing destination marketing. In US, New York City is the most visited city for overseas visitors and is believed to attract more visitors in the future. (Office of Travel & Tourism Industries, 2008) To examine how the destination image is communicated to affect tourist's buying behavior and how previous visitation impacts on destination image are crucial in attempts to attract both potential and repeated visitors. Chinese tourists are thought to be the next most influential market in international tourism (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Chon (1992) purposed self-image /product-image congruity theory to demonstrate that tourist's satisfaction level with a destination had relationship with their perception of self-image. It implies that in studying destination image and traveling behavior, self-congruity of targeted market—Chinese tourists have to be examined. Hence, destination marketers of NYC could improve their marketing strategies to target Chinese tourists more precisely with a better understanding of this issue.

This research is intended to investigate the bi-directional influence between the formation of destination image and the tourist buying process by conducting empirical analysis of Chinese tourists travelling to New York City. This study proposes to address: 1) What are the roles of image formation agents at different stages of tourism buying process and 2) What is the impact of past travel experience on destination image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to address the research questions, literatures about the definition of destination image, the composition and formation agents of destination image, and the key theory of customer buying process and destination loyalty were reviewed.

Attempting to conceptualize destination image and its functional relationships with related concepts, Tasci & Gartner (2007) constructed a model connecting destination image and consumer behavior, in which destination image is characterized by the types of formation source and its components. Consumer behavior is subcategorized into pre-visit, during visit and post-visit phases, which have numerous attitudinal and behavioral factors that influence destination image. Literature review below will be structured base on this model.

The definition of image is one of the most ill-defined concepts in tourism studies. The definition of image is shaped quite differently in different studies, most likely in facilitation of their studies. However, it generally include the impression, thoughts, believes and other mental representation that a person has of a destination.(Hunt,1971;

Lawson & Bond-Bovy, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Kotler et al, 1994; Santos Arrebola, 1994; as cited in Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002) Impression is believed to be individually selected "among the flood of total impressions".(Fakeye and Crompton, 1991;) Stereotyping and prejudice also affect the forming of destination image (Parenteau, 1995, as cited in Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002).

Great efforts have been invested into attempts of conceptualizing the composition of destination image. By synthesizing all the components of image, Bouding (1956) stated three main components: cognitive, affective and conative. Characteristics of image component were examined by Echtner & Ritchie (1991), who created the "three axes", which represent the existence of the three dimensions of destination image: functional and psychological; attributes and holistic; common and unique. Understanding the formation of destination image is also essential to numerous image studies. Using Gartner's(1993) theory of seven major agents of destination image formation process, Tasci & Gartner(2007) categorized three sources 1) supply-side sources: overt induced Type I & Type II; 2) Independent sources: covert induced Type I & Type II and autonomous; 3) demand-side sources: unsolicited organic and solicited organic.

Numerous researchers have identified key phases in tourist's buying process. (Strong, 1925; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Crissy, Boewadt & Laudadio, 1975; McDaniel, 1979; Cunningham & Cunningham, 1981; Russ & Kirkpatrick, 1982, as cited in Mill and Morrison, 2006) In Crissy's (1975) theory, these phases are awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption, where the former three stages can be grouped into pre-visit phase, trial in during-visit phase and adoption in post-visit phase. The way destination image affects consumer buying behavior has as well been studied. Fakeye & Crompton (1991) has linearly connected tourist's buying process and image formation. They stated that motivation to travel comes from organic image of destination, leads to active information search. During this process, induced image is formed. Combining organic and induced image, evaluation of destinations among alternatives was conducted and then results in selection of destination. After destination visit, a more complex image is formed, only to impact the evaluation of destination for the next visit.

The interaction between destination image and consumer buying process in the phase of post-visit behavior relates heavily to the destination loyalty. Day (1969) argued that there are two dimensions in addressing loyalty: attitudinal loyalty, which requires a psychological commitment; and behavioral loyalty, which is reflected by the consistency of buying behavior (as cited in Li, Petrick & Zhou, 2008). According to this theory on the impact of visitation experience on destination image at post-visit phase, an appreciation of travel experience will result in sharing and recommending the destination to friends and relatives(attitudinal loyalty) and make repeat visit to the destination(behavior loyalty).

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

For this study the researchers propose the use of semi-structured interviews. The interview will be composed of four sections: the descriptive destination image on New York City; the time-span, channels and sources of the formation of the image created; participants' previous travel experience and other related demographical questions; and the strength of impact of different forms and characteristics of image formation resources on the process of tourism decision making. For measuring current destination image of NYC, the research will adopt the listed attributes of assessing cognitive component, affective component and overall image from previous image researches on other destinations (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Chen & Hsu, 2000; Rittichainu et al., 2001; Leisen, 2001;) The later part is designed to be open-ended questions to capture the unexplored relationship between image formation process and tourism consumption process. It is expected that result drawn from content analysis of interviews would be less bounded and with less path dependence comparing to previous studies. Furthermore, it could open a window for exploration of the unexamined.

There will be two phases of conducting this study. In the first phase, data will be collected from students of a major university in a Midwestern state in the U.S. 10 convenient samples will be drawn in a pool of Chinese students who had travel experience in NYC. The intention for this pilot data collection phase is for testing and revision of measurements and the constructing of interview questions. The expected conduction days will be in January, 2011. In the second phase, online survey will be conducted to reach tourists living in mainland China. Tourists at different stages of tourism buying process, including potential tourists, tourists who already planned their visits and previous visitors will be interviewed for the purpose of comparison and analysis. At this stage of data collection, researcher will provide the research instrument in Chinese language for being better understood by the research subjects. This phase will be conducted in early February, 2011.

IMPLICATIONS

This study could facilitate a better understanding of the relationship among destination image formation, consumer buying behavior and destination loyalty conceptually. Regarding practical implication, it will provide better directions for marketers to improve their destination image projection through different channels of communication, which would attract the tourists to the destination with higher time and capital efficiency.

REFERENCES

- Chon (1992)"Self-image/destination image congruity" *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19: 360-176.
- Chon (1991)"Tourism destination image modification process: marketing implications" *Tourism Management*, March: 68-72.
- Echtner, C.M., & Ritchie, J.R.B. (1991)"The meaning and measurement of destination image" *Journal of Tourism Studies*, 2(12):2-12.
- Gallaraz, M.G., Saura, I.G., & Garcia, H.C. (2002)"Destination Image: Towards a conceptual Framework" *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(1):56-78.
- Gartner W.C. (1993)"Image formation process" *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 2(2/3):191-216.
- Li, X.R., Petrick, J.F., Zhou, Y.N. (2008) "Towards a conceptual framework of tourists' destination knowledge and loyalty" *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 8(3):79-96.
- Mill, R.C., Morrison, A.M. (2006). *The Tourism System* (Fifth Edition). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- NYC and Company (2009)"NYC Statistics" Retrieved from <http://www.nycgo.com/?event=view.article&id=78912>
- Pearce, P.L. (1982) "Perceived changes in holiday destinations" *Annals of Tourism Research*, 9: 145-164.
- Rittichainuwat, B.N., Qu, H., Brown, T.J. (2001)"Thailand's international travel image: mostly favorable" *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 42(2):82-95.
- Swarbrooke, J., Horner, S. (2007). *Consumer Behavior* (Second Edition). Burlington, MA: Elsevier Ltd.
- Tasci A.D.A., Gartner, W.C., & Cavusgil, S.T. (2007)"Conceptualization and operationalization of destination image" *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 31(2): 194-233.
- Tasci A.D.A., Gartner, W.C. (2007) "Destination image and its functional relationships" *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(4):413-425.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, ITA, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries; Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2009) "2009 marketing profile: China" Retrieved from http://www.tinet.ita.doc.gov/outreachpages/download_data_table/2009_China_Market_Profile.pdf
- U.S. Department of Commerce, ITA, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (2008)

"Overseas visitors: travel to New York City in 2008" In-Flight Survey of International Air Travelers. Retrieved from http://www.nycgo.com/cms/uploadedFiles/thricenycvisitcom/assets/pdf/All%20Overseas%20Visitors_2008_hp.pdf